



An Exploration of ‘Married Love’ by Tessa Hadley

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One of the most accomplished fiction writers of the twenty-first century, the British writer Tessa Hadley (1956-till present), is known for her exceptional power of seizing the familiar moments in our life that we would normally not think of highlighting. She is the author of several acclaimed novels and short stories such as *Accidents in the Home*, *Everything Will Be All Right*, *The Master Bedroom*, *The London Train*, *Clever Girl*, *The Past*, *Late in the Day*, *Free Love*, *Married Love and Other Stories*, *Bad Dreams*, etc. Capturing the beauty of ordinary lives, she writes about the drama of everyday life: complicated family relationships, love affairs, marriages, divorces, and betrayal.

Portraying love affairs or domestic issues is not new in literature. However, Hadley's close observations of everyday life portraying the ways men and women relate to one another in her short stories find a new dimension for the readers. Readers are drawn to the themes, issues, and characters because they can relate to them. An example of a short story titled ‘Married Love’ published in 2012 in the collection of short stories *Married Love and Other Stories*, is discussed below.

The story begins abruptly when the narrator tells us ‘Lottie announced that she was getting married’ (Hadley 1). The readers are plunged directly amid Lottie's conflict with her family. The core aspects of the struggle between the protagonist-Lottie and her family are revealed gradually as Lottie reveals her romance with her music teacher.

Lottie is the youngest daughter of Hattie and Duncan, and she declares her intention to get married unexpectedly at the breakfast table. None of her family members are happy to hear this news because Lottie is nineteen, and Hattie, her mother, feels she's ‘so young.’ At first, her family members don't take her seriously, but she insists that she is an adult and has the right to make decisions. Like a typical 21st-century teenager, she tells her mother, “You forget that I

have a whole life of my own now, as an adult, outside of this house, about which you know nothing, absolutely nothing.” (Hadley 3).

From the conversations with her family members, Lottie appears silly and immature when she fancies that she is in love with ‘a great man,’ who is forty-five years older than her. Giving the readers more insight, Hadley shows how Noah, Lottie's brother, feels for his sister:

‘He knew how passionately she succumbed to the roles she dreamed up for herself. He thought she won't be able to get out of this one. She can't stop now.’ (Hadley 9).

When her family was not convinced about Lottie's choice of Edgar Lennox, a man who writes religious music, in her bewilderment, Lottie asks her family, “How can you not want for me what I want?” She says, “He's touched my life and transformed it” (Hadley 5). She is in love with Edgar Lennox- a man ‘old enough to be Lottie's grandfather. It's quite natural for Hattie to be disgusted about her daughter's choice of a man over forty years older than Lottie. She's right when she thinks of complaining to Lottie's university. She decides to be out of this ‘crazy wedding’ as she calls her daughter's marriage.

The wisest person in Lottie's family is shown to be Mr. Duncan, Lottie's father. He understands that his daughter will be headstrong and unstoppable about her decision. He consoles his wife by saying, ‘It has to run its course... We're not in a position to prevent anything’ (Hadley 9). The most interesting part about Duncan is when he mocks his daughter by saying:

“When you say he's touched your life, could we be quite specific about this? Has he actually, in the ordinary, non-transcendent sense of the word, touched you?” (Hadley 5)

The exchange between the father and the daughter shows Hadley's humor at its best. The readers come across a

humorous description of Lottie and Edgar when Lottie's father overhears someone referring to the bride and the groom as 'Little Nell and her grandfather.' There's another example of humor when the narrator says:

'Hattie had been longing for early retirement, but she decided against it, fearing that the empty days might only fill up with grandchildren' (Hadley 13).

As very much predicted, soon, the fanciful thoughts of being married to an elderly man begin to fade for Lottie. Her life has completely changed over the years. Lottie's feelings about her old husband fade as she tells her brother Noah, "I'm grey." She complained. "My life's so grey." (Hadley 15). The readers see that Lottie is paying the price for making a wild decision in her life. She gave up her studies and no longer 'glowed with the promise of her future.' Her parents warned her, but she was overconfident about her relationship with Edgar. Not only the relationship but Lottie is also now suspicious about her husband's music. Noah asks his sister: "Is Edgar any good? I mean, is his music really, actually any good?" (Hadley 17) Lottie is confused as she says "I can't tell. I think he's good" (Hadley 17).

From the exchange between the siblings, it is obvious that much has changed between Lottie and her elderly husband. He likes to shut himself in a room in his ex-wife Valerie's house for his work. Now Lottie can no longer proudly tell her brother, "He tells me everything. We don't have secrets" (Hadley 11), as she once told her mother about Edgar. The protagonist confronts harsh reality, and all her romantic dreams have vanished in thin air. The narrator tells us at the end of the story that the seventy-two-year-old husband of Lottie was 'absorbed, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.' Hadley does not show any twist in the ending because, from the beginning of the story, she hints through the comment of Lottie's father that his daughter's fantasies would fade soon. Hence the readers expected that it would be difficult for the protagonist to continue her married life with her husband old enough to be her grandfather.

Notably, the story is narrated using the third person (omniscient) point of view. There is hardly any direct presentation of Edgar's character through his actions or words. It is interesting to notice that the real conflict in the story starts because Lottie decides to marry him, and later because of him, she loses all her fanciful dreams. Her views toward marriage completely change. But Edgar remains the same from the beginning till the end with no development. Readers learn about him mostly from how other characters view him or how Lottie presents him. He remains a passive character throughout.

The story's title prepares the readers for what is expected to be told. As the story unfolds the drama of a love affair

between a teenage girl who intends to marry an elderly man, the author fulfils her purpose of portraying the irrational decisions taken by teenagers and how the harsh realities of life shatter their dreams. The themes and issues in the story are not new, but the way Hadley presents the characters and their everyday problems, probing deep into their minds, keeps the readers hooked till the end.

Although the story is written straightforwardly, themes like love, marriage, family, romantic dreams, harsh reality, and disillusionment hold the readers' attention throughout. In summing up, it can be said that by letting the readers penetrate the psychology of her characters, Tessa Hadley has captured a family relationship powerfully. Her keen observation of minute details of daily reality in the story 'Married Love' makes Hadley an exceptional storyteller of the twenty-first century. Her compelling and captivating tales deserve to be read.

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